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POEMS

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BY

MILTON S. ROSE

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POEMS

SONNETS TO A FRIEND

I

BY THE FIRE

Comrade, I think not often among men
Are they have seen the clear light and divine
As we, with such compelling beauty shine
When youth made bright the speeding days, or when
The tyrannous years brought death within our ken;
For never we felt need of stronger wine
Than hours together for minds to intertwine
And so to reach high dreams of tone or pen.
I am not grateful to the sundering years
For recompense of power; nor would I know

These meek survivors of youth's great
desire.
I find no goodlier dreams; nor yet ap-
pears
A mountain-side where sprightlier wa-
ters flow,
Nor hearth where kindlier glows the
evening fire.

II

BY THE RIVER

Friends there may be, though rarely, on the earth
So true in faith, of such unchanging choice.
The years that leave us now no longer boys
Bear steadily the light of friendship's worth;
The steep and unstayed years, hurried with mirth,
With all their sweet, inconstant, and forgetful joys,
Divide us not when life's tumultuous voice
Silences seaward from its mountain birth.
And still shall not divide, when deeps appear
Too awful and profound for mortal sight;
On that dim verge where fails the last faint light,

To all the elemental languors near,
There, too, shall we step onward without fear,
One hand thus firmly on the infinite.

III

BY THE CHURCH

So long men hold those corporal gods in pay
To call their world-worn spirits from their graves!
Living, they are but pale transmuted slaves
To their dead selves; and, being dead, betray
The trusting spirit to what darkness! Day
Falls faintly where that stifling gloom depraves.
'The night that sunders is the light that saves,
And death more beautiful than life,' they say.
Friend, when at last the stillness wins consent
And takes me to the vastness of the ground,
Yet would I show in you such love, content

With so slight change of being wherein
'tis bound,
That summer after summer it be said:
'While his friend lives he is but little
dead.'

IV

IN THE FIELDS

Our obligations are not done at death,
Nor shall our labors with our cares be done.
Our life begins not with its natal sun,
But budding from those formless dreams beneath
Which deep ideals of centuries bequeath,
We come; and then, with all that's lost or won,
Again work down the blindness. One by one
Fall seeds that fail not with the sower's breath.
Our love, too, had birth but no beginning,
And though it perish, so shall never end;
Building yet on through other's love and sinning,

With the wide universe at last to blend.
Nearer, nearer the dark days are winning:
My service shall not fail you, O my friend.

V

FROM THE SHORE

How shall we give our seeing of these white
foam-flowers
Each to the other and so to all men born?
Beyond the limits of a self outworn,
The soul goes reaching on with widening
powers
To new realities. These living hours
Shall touch with warm light many a waiting
morn,
Be seen in distant sunsets. Though death has
torn
The present from us, the future still is ours.
What need the soul diviner ministry
To mend the wrong of death? When
self is done,
The moods of life, its currency of pain
And joy forever done, we still shall be

A finer substance, as light from a vanished sun
Gives yet the heavens a star. So we remain.

TO MY FATHER — BLIND

A STROKE of darkness cuts thy life in twain
And stains with chaos all thy nights and days;
It walls with emptiness thy earthly ways;
It drops thy past, like a dumb, spacious pain,
About thy spirit; though man may not attain
Serener retrospect, nor calmer gaze
Where deed and consequence together praise
Hours that have been and shall not be again.

Thine eyes behold the rains of long ago
Greening the pastures where a boy's swift flight
Stayed the cloud's shadow; or, of labor done,
Review the steady winning, even to know
That she who woke thy manhood and thy might
Holds thy confiding hand and leads thee on.

KÄRMA

The blindness that blots out the earth's control
Lightens the soul within. Death's lightning stuns
The sense; but thought, swifter than lightning, runs
The past and present in one spaceless whole
And leads thee dying to thine inherent goal;
When, in the glare of all thy numbered suns,
Thy memory loosens all her forms at once.
And the wide heavens blaze with thine own soul.

What then for thee? Ignoble or sublime,
What shall thy vision be? What hour leap white
Fixed in its everlasting ecstasy?

What endless word shall fill thine ear? when
Time
Explodes against the congregated night
To instantaneous eternity.

THE POET AT NIGHT IN THE HILLS

Here in the sentient stillness of the hills,
This vast suspense of calm, where one may live
Forgetful of the fevered hours, and give
His whole soul to the silence, the blue-dark fills
His mountain mood; the steady moonlight stills
To dream the forested slopes and peaks pensive,
Where beauty walks divinely fugitive,
Or stays her image in the poolèd rills.

From all this open ecstasy of sky
Some power descends to meet the aspiring mind;
Some echo of old song from soul too high,
Too imperious for death to bind;
Some stir of spirit borne on the wind's light sigh;
Some gleam of love in substance unconfined.

QUEEN OMPHALE

Queen Omphale, of the pale brow, with hands
Weaker than lilies, took the lion's hide
From him who slew the lion. Then she tied
Earth's mightiest of men in woman's bands;
Placed him among her maids, with low commands
To ply the distaff — he who far and wide
Sought the Hesperides, and twelve times tried,
Slew the monstrous fiends of many lands.

Dead is Alcides, yea, long æons past
And all his labors to oblivion cast;
But time shall not undo the tender grace
That flowed about him from the fair Queen's face;
And still the dream of beauty shall outlast
The cloven Pillars and the wielded mace.

A WORD FROM THE GRASS

For me her tears shall never flow.
Her tender hand shall take not pain
With love from me, nor longing stain
The glad young heart I shall not know.

Even as Nature is to her
So would I be. The griefless days
Wake beauty on her youthful ways
And bring her joys that hardly stir

The bright calm of her happiness.
Oh, may I mix with these! Allow
My love to linger round her brow
Mistaken for the wind's caress.

My love, unfelt, beneath her feet
Be as the unconsidered grass.
Or veiled where time's dim shadows pass
Help Life to make her life complete.

SHADOWS

There is no shadow in her soul's bright room,
Those marvelous chambers where no darkness is;
And strange to see the clear transparencies
Where silent moving men, like ghosts of gloom,
With noiseless trumpets hail an unseen doom;
Pale children pause to unheard melodies,
Pure-eyed against the stillness; white lilies
Watch through an azure indolence of bloom.
Her eyes cannot accept our earthly night.
Beyond the dark, the surging of the years
Where life dissolves in time, her clear eyes see
Undimmed the starry spaces fixed in light;
For night is but the shadow of our fears,
And death the shadow of reality.

NO ONE IN THE WORLD

No one in the world before
Could speak as you have spoken;
And waiting your voice a silence
Had never been broken.

The air is alive with tones,
Each one an echo waking;
But yet was there saved a silence
For your breaking.

NONE BUT THE BRAVE

Snowy Atalanta's swift white feet
Forgot their ecstasy of speed, despaired
To win the race with love, and turned to meet
The gasping smile of one behind — who dared.

ASPIRATION

Give me of your calmness, Earth. O Night,
Drop your blue-dark stillness round my heart.
Time, for one hour lift me to her delight,
Close, close to beauty. Then let me depart.

A NIGHT MOOD

The silent night is round me, close as death,
Too near for sleep. A comfort almost pain
Floods the wide darkness, where, like pas-
sion's wraith,
Hovers a want my life can scarce contain.

LOVE AND NIGHT

O FAR-OFF delight, and long desired,
On what white crests of morning may we meet?
Tempestuous tides of darkness round your feet,
Where you stand lone, in storm of night attired,
Thin in their flowing. About you, high cliffs spired
In turbulence of motion sway like wheat
In the onrushing hours that, palely fleet,
Leave them in the gleam of morning fired.
Shall I not reach the height where darkness keeps
Always a memory of you, a glow
Of waiting dawn, a spring of heavenly light?
There Time shall not forget the love that sleeps

Splendid in silence, a warmth beneath
the snow,
A dream of beauty to outlive the
night.

ON THE PRAIRIE

Under the wide blue silence of the sky
We rode the fading dimness, like a sea,
Into the purple wonder, she and I,
Dipping the hill-crests of eternity.

MY GIFT

Some thing I'd give her not by Time decreed;
Some brightness unexpected of the sun;
Some splendid flower that never was a seed;
Some rare completion never yet begun.

AWAKENED

I HARDLY knew her when the world said, 'Go,'
And from mystery back to mystery she went.
She left a sunset-color on the snow,
And in my soul a sacred discontent.

GOOD-NIGHT

Back to our homes, to safety, sleep, discretion;
Back to consider, to relive, recover;
Back to custom, comfort, and tradition;
Back to the Famished Islands. All is over.

THEKLA

Strange, all strange! At last the Pain has won me —
Falls at last like balm the hurtless Pain;
Life's cold hand eternally upon me
Rain for light, for love gave only rain.

Sweet, sweet Grief! All Earth's unspoken grieving
All life long lies close about my heart;
Day by day one gift and one receiving,
Safe from Joy where Pain may not depart.

AUTUMN

Pale thoughts from my heart that grieves
Fall with the yellow listless leaves;
Dull November's chill constrains
All the summer's wasted pains,
Drifts them through the aimless air,
And through her absence my despair.

Far on the death-flushed pasture-swells
Burn the sumac's cold farewells,
Sunset on the hours of hope.
There the dark earth-forces slope
Against man's dream of kindness. Long
Shall be the struggle of the strong.

IN THE GARDEN

THE FRITILLARIAS

If plants were human, 'twere a merry group!
I pause among these spotted marriage-bells
To hear their faint pursuit of happiness;
Of varied hue — white, brown, or purple-dark,
But, sweet or bitter, ever in motley coat
As if the jester's name still stood upon
Its ancient honor. 'Nay, prithee, give me leave.'

What dragons of the mind are these? Coiled
fronds
Of old-world monstrous passions, meeker now
Than all their riotous fierceness fed upon!
Beneath the direst hate, a patience sleeps
Biding its time, till love shall claim its own.

THE PANSIES

WHAT antic fancy set these pansies near?
Oh, the bland insolence of that pious face!
Virtue, without a touch of mercy in it,
Made mad with too much vision, like kneeling saint!
Only less deadly, for these gambol here,
With mad ears cocked athwart, at the least breeze.
But then, when quiet comes, at once returns
The aproned primness and affected grace;
The Sunday glamour smirks in holiness,
And upcast empty eyes say, 'O my God.'

THE PRIMROSE

Deep evening quietness of white acclaim
Of the cool dark, whence came
This frail pale loveliness of remembered joy
Of soul-light in the boy;
Calm sweetness gathered from the bitter soil
Where garish airs and acrid sands despoil
Each day the night's fair toil;
Moon-pictures of earth-yearning for the moon,
Seen by a vanished June;
A white skiff moored upon the shores of dream
Behind the sunset's beam,
Touching with delicate prow the sensuous land,
Waiting the spirit-hand
To guide it where the stronger breezes blow,
Rocking slow
In tender lightness on the long ago;

A chalice full of purest white
Drawn marvelously from night;
A kiss of love undying when death's despair
Makes hopeless the bleak air:
Till Life be done with labor, done with gain,
With all the fruitless pain,
And with a sickle wrought of moonbeams
reap
The flowers of love for Sleep.

PIKES PEAK

The blight of time is on that giant tor
That dreamed a form too vast for life's confines,
Too far above his fellows, and found death.
Death, but not dissolution. The years are thin
That beat on those cold sunny precipices
Bereft of beauty, though sublime of might,
An exalted loneliness that will not pass
But look to the dead moon forevermore.

Here death has laid his devastating touch;
One hand caught here from the polar vastnesses,
Whence, creeping his silent fingers ever down,
Those dull amœbic fingers of the ice,
Gathering inexorably the world in grasp,
He comes to meet this mountain desolate.

TO A LIVERWORT

Some far kinship draws me. Water and rock
Conspire to this pale miracle of green,
This plasmic alchemy of naked life,
Blindly, in such lush sensuousness of cells
As if the moist dusk had taken shape
And caught the woodland's oozy lassitude
In flowing greenness which feels about the ledge
With a dim tender sense, buds forth a branch
In answer to a sound of dripping water
And droops its smooth cascades of indolent leaf,
Shaped by a delicate sensitiveness of will,
Clasped by close fibers to the nourishing stone.

What sense unknown, that gives this joy of being,
Secured in unrealized mastery of time,

Guides its live tip to mysteries of law
That, followed, shall unfold infinity?
How should this plant, so near the immortal
germ
Of protoplasmic being, this youth of life,
Fostered in nature's twilight secrecies,
Molded by some innate component urge,
Build its soft kindred upward through the
ages
To shapes of lofty plant-intelligence
That take the strong endearments of the sun
Fearless, the embrace with creative soul,
And make with it our vital universe?

So, kneeling on this altar of the moss,
I greet, at faint remove, the human soul.

ANIMAL DISPUTANS

Green passions rise in me like monstrous frogs,
Jutting broad sensual noses through the mind
(Pangs of my ancient self that still am I).
Sprawling afloat with baby hands set wide,
They take the sunlight with their uncouth
blinks,
Irreverently musing on the day
As if the conscious soul were their own slime,
Or top of their thick generative mess
Which puts them forth as buds into the light.

But I know frogs like not pure flowing
streams.

Shall cold corporeal things pollute the pool
That takes the amorous beauty of the moon
Within its bosom, and cherishes loveliness
From unattainable stars?

Frogs are but algæ grown coöperative.
But still, they trouble me with their humanness,
Intrude within my sanctities of self
Till sometimes I forget my state and kneel
In kindly mood toward these dim lumps of sense
Which sit demurely with their rippling throats
To feed upon the idle summer hours
Unmarred by holy visions unfulfilled,
Oblivious of destinies not theirs.
Of course, when I approach they dive below,
Splashing headfirst through august idea
To squirm white bellies in the seepy ooze,
And in the dark, plan procreative joys.
I know not how to keep the surface clear
So soon again floats up the muddy stain!
Where soul and sky, in blue communion pure,
Commingling light in rapt ecstatic pause,
Lie placidly, they poke their blunt snouts through;

There suddenly I see their bulgy eyes
Bobbing serenely on my wavy dream.
And where the floating lilies make Heaven
bend low
In adoration, they dare venture in
As though the loveliness were part of them.

What mean these croaking crudities of sense,
These lumpish glomerates of lower life,
To break into our human dignities?

Yet they breathe air, and may one day be
birds.

IDEALS

From steaming compost of select mundungus
Shoot beaded prongs; erupting saprophytes
Cool the dead air with shapes of fetid fungus
Hailed, praised, adored by the gardener troglodytes.

ON A DEAD HONEY-BEE

Hast found the eternal daylight of thy dreams,
With infinite range of freshest pasture-bloom,
And windless flights to bring thy honeyed schemes
Home to the hive of never-lessening room?

A WEED

A FLOWER,
But one too wise
To waste its hours in show;
Too slight in beauty, too abject in mood;
Too easily content with instant ends;
Too little dreaming of love
And so unloved:
A weed.

THE END OF THE DAY

1

DAY-FALL

Out of blossoming April's air
Fall the petals of the day;
Sunset on the leaves of night
Fades to a soft twilight tone;
Downy coolness from the dells
Touches the pale air with dun;
Dreamy silence stills the sky,
Broods a stillness through the pause,
While from shadow of the firs
Cloud the vaporous wisps of sleep.

2

TWILIGHT

Change drifts through the listening air
Invisibly to vision's dream;
Mauve to mereness of the mist.
Out of pallor starts the star;
Greyness creeps about the hill,
Blurs the forest to a gloom;
Darkness mingles with the dusk;
Slowly from retreats of light,
Under stone and crannied bark,
Hidden senses seize on life,
Beady bluntness hums abroad;
Drowsy passions stir the shade;
Pale moths feel the odorous deeps
Of white wide lilies, calmly pure.

3

NIGHT

Moves the midnight toward the West
Splendidly attired in time;
Distance burns divinely down,
Attar of the infinite;
Through immensities of mind
Life surrenders to the stars;
Thinks a unity with space
Of mortality immune;
Touches silence with a hope;
Weaves the starlight in a song,
Cadences of cloudless winds,
Echoes borne from other worlds,
Breaking the silence of the soul
Beyond the farthest flight of dream.

THE UNLIVING

Two lone aged Memories weep
On the slopes of sleep:
One still eager, one still fair,
Both are weeping there.

Subtle-souled old wizards they
Who live not by day;
Then with soft spells touch the dark
To a vital spark:

Take the sealed scroll of the years
(Loosened with their tears)
And, as night should ever last,
Build the busy past.

One looks through the lives of men
Spirit-pure; and then
Dauntless goes he forth, alone
Makes the earth his own.

One the spaceless lightning dares;
And all life's cramping cares
Vanish in the far caress
Of visioned Loveliness.

Time blows bitterly o'er the hill
With an evil will.
Broad day clings against the steep
Where, though dead, they weep.

AT THE GRAVE

Leave her there with the silence round her.
We must back to the world of sound;
For us once more the song and the laughter;
For her, the ground.

Leave her there with the darkness round her.
We're away to the world of light;
For us, the uses of the sunshine:
For her, the night.

EXPERIENCE

Mother of Memories, take hence my soul.
You have wrought strangely what was soft
and fair:
Of song have you made silence; of hope, de-
spair;
And of my springtime's burning aureole
Brow-burden, out of darkness and of dole.
Of life too dear for losing now I wear
The faintness of far being. The shattered air
Of sunset lures me to an unknown goal.
Mother of Memories, now let me go.
I failed the high commandments of your joy
In search for loveliness earth may not
know,
And tender dreams that life may not em-
ploy.
Let it be so. I was a foolish boy:
I loved the image I had made of snow.

PERSONALITY

A GENTLE spirit struggles through the cloud
That life's dull anger settled on her face —
A sad discordant ugliness that time
Wrung from the human substance in far ages.
Passionate hatreds that despoiled the past,
Scars of innate disused old miseries,
Meaningless wounds of dangers long since done
Dismayed the features of the timid girl.
Like the sky above a cyclone, her lurid mind
Is strewn with earthiness. Thoughts work her wrong;
Violent promptings stain her tender lips
With curves of combat; dark, envious cruelties

Shake her pained heart with doubts, and
leave her soul
Estranged in life from all she wants
to be.

'A BIT OF CHILDHOOD THROWN AWAY'

Her life sank with the sun. We saw,
All saw how still she lay.
A stone no soul had ever loved
Had lain like her all day.

Where shall we seek? How be allayed
The night she waits beneath?
We see the flowers her breath has swayed
But cannot see her breathe.

The suns go over, one by one,
Her grave so very small.
The whirling great earth half forgets
She ever lived at all.

For now the silence is her heart;
Far off — does it not beat?
We see her footprints everywhere,
But cannot see her feet.

THE MATERNAL WISH

It is not well a man should ere forget
The sheltering closure of his mother's arm.
No one outgrows the need. The warrior's heart
Brazed to the iron destinies of war
Turns from the shouted plaudits for that warmth.
Whose soul is tuned to trade, to overawe
By force of presence, when life's hurt is felt,
Again a sobbing child runs headlong in.
Who would be great must still remain a child.
He who forgets, in life's austerities,
The tenderness of pity, or thinks it less
Than glorious renown, has marked himself

A man unworthy of his mother's
breast;
And he, ere long, shall sleep among
the dead.

THE DEAD

I know that I should be ashamed to weep
Or lay my naked forehead to the ground
To seek the healing incense of that calm
So near beneath. The shadow on my soul
Draws downward to the perfect shadow there.
I am not, as I was, a being free
To spurn the underground; for out of it
A subtle love pervades the painless earth,
Now he's within: 'tis mine now; all the mold
That presses round him is a part of me,
And takes to some far oneness all I am,
Inviting ever with recompense supreme
To hidden goal that death may not displace,
Though dark, obscured by strangeness cast
between.
To me, a living man, wild hours will come
Uniting him and me in common quest,
Some pity of old life prevailing still,

After the cold has closed our hearts to sense,
To be not yet forgotten of growing things,
Not wholly from the sunlight cast away
When April's riot loosens the cold ground,
But secretly lifted from the passionless grave
Again to rise, again to bathe in air
In green delight of wind and procreant sun.

What is it to be dead? The drifting years
Spangle the silence with memories of him;
And his far hopes that time could not fulfill
Are calling through the dawn's clear mysteries,
Calling to purposes grief cannot give,
And leading to a largess of regret
Beyond my scope of sorrow, to find again
Retrieving solace in a human world
Where grief of mine is slight as a broken flower
Before swift surges of oncoming life;
For in the field of that immense design
Our present pains move small as on a star.

Against that vision all our woes grow bright,
And living man, submerged in his own
thought,
Dreaming on pleasures he may not attain,
Fashions a paradise for other men
That opens to him in the glorious dream.
So one high wish illuminates the grave.

HER JOY

Blue sky above her, and violets the while
Crowding about her feet like eager pets:
Stooping she dropt, for joy, a light swift smile
Between her bright heart and the violets.

HER INDIFFERENCE

No star to-night can pierce the dusky gray;
Instead, these white sky-missiles of soft snow:
She, too, has nature's moods, and turns away
Tired of the stars, of love, of all we know.

HER HANDS

Idle in beauty lay her flowing hands
Shaping a cell of warm repose, so dear,
So inly tender, I saw with no surprise
My own heart, unhurt, held beating there.

HER MUSIC

The deep adagios lend their soul to shape,
And sing in the silent motions of her hand;
From every line the flowing tones escape,
The rich harmonics without sound expand.

HER SCORN

To-day again she spoke not. The cold knife
Of time draws slow across my brow. O God,
Each night I wring the fabric of my life
And taste the few drops of blood.

HER INJUSTICE

I DID not choose to love her. Earth is all
Stirring with fears, and deaths that will not rise.
My soul halts, hearkening her soul's lost call;
Then flees o'er the earth with panic-stricken eyes.

HER COLDNESS

How passionately I believed her breath
Should one day warm my soul! Now the life-
plot
Tears me from my dream. O Death, Death,
How can I leave her when she loves me not?

HER IMPERFECTION

Life could not let her beauty have full sway
To shape her in all forgetfulness of earth:
But when she smiles, Death is a child at play
Who runs to her with roses of new birth.

HER SECRET

Out of her heart she took a smile
With fancy-fingers tenderly,
And shaped it like her heart, the while
She laid it on my lips to be
Her spirit-seal of secrecy.

And now I live within her heart
So quietly that even her thought
Can hear no sound. Life cannot part
Me from her bosomed dream; but naught
Shall tell her of the wonder wrought.

HER IMMANENCE

Of night's wide starlight I would ask no less
To fill the promise of my soul's desire:
Her hand upon my heart, her loveliness,
For one deep silent hour her soul of fire.

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